

Tracing PASTS

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Bay County Genealogy Society

October has been designated as Family History Month. This designation was made in hopes that Americans would do something special to draw attention to and promote family history. The older we get, the more we understand how important it is to know and learn from our history. History is documented by dates of major events, but what happened in between those dates were the daily lives

of our ancestors. When we forget the lives of those who have gone before us, we are robbed of the substance that made us who we are.

To help promote Family History Month, Orrin G. Hatch sponsored a Senate bill (S.R. 160) to designate October as "Family History Month." He said, "Millions of Americans are researching the history of their families. Experts say that in the United States, genealogy is now the second most popular hobby next to gardening. It is only natural that we

want to find out more about our ancestors, and what better way to bring families closer together than by discovering more about the story of their own family? Like it or not, who we are today is, in large part, a product of our ancestors."

In 2003, then-President George Bush signed two presidential proclamations in support of Family History Month. In an article by Legacy Multimedia, Bush said, "Lessons in family lineage are often lessons in courage, endurance, and love. While tracing our

roots can be challenging, the rewards can be great — affirming our pride in our history and keeping us mindful of the sacrifices of our forebears."

What is the difference between family history and genealogy? I have always used these two terms interchangeably, but there is a difference. Genealogy is the study of a person's ancestry and descendants. It deals with discovering who the members of a specific family are and how these family members are related to each other.

Today many genealogists are more interested in using genealogy research as a tool to understand their family history. To do this, we need to look beyond names and dates and look at our ancestors' lives through a historical timeline. Our ancestors' actions can be better understood when we know what was happening around them. For example, events surrounding the Civil War were one of the most life-altering periods in American history.

Over the past several years, the Bay County

Genealogy Society has presented a fall seminar in recognition of Family History Month.

This year we are proud to present guest speaker Jerry Merritt, from the West Florida Genealogy Society. His program will consist of a two part PowerPoint presentation on an introduction to African American genealogy and searching for our ancestors using the Internet. The free mini-seminar will be Oct. 15, from 1-3:30 p.m. at Bay County Library in Panama City.